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Her Body like a Lantern Next to Me

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JOHN RYBICKI

Her Body Like a Lantern Next to Me

There's this movie I am watching:
my love's belly almost five months
pregnant with cancer,

more like a little rock wall
piled and fitted inside her
than some prenatal rounding.

Over there's her face
near the frying pan she's bent over,
but there's no water in the pan,

and so, no reflection. No pool
where I might gather such a thing as a face,
or sew it there on a tablet made of water.

To have and to haul it away,
sometimes dipping into her
in the next room that waits for me.

*

I am old at this, stretching the wick
again into my throat when the flame burns down.
She's splashing in the tub and singing,

*I love him very much, though I'm old
and tired and cancerous.*

It's spring and now she's stopping traffic,

lifting one of her painted turtles
across the road. Someone's honking, pumping an arm
out the window, cheering her on.

She falls then like there's a house
on her back, hides her head in the bank grass
and vomits into the ditch.

*

She keeps her radioactive linen,
bowl and spoon separate. For seven days
we sleep in different rooms.

Over there's the toilet she's been
heaving her roots into. One time I heard her
through the door make a toast to it,

Here's to you, toilet bowl.
There's nothing poetic about this.
I have one oar that hangs

from our bedroom window,
and I am rowing our hut
in the same desperate circle.

*

I warm her tea then spread
cream cheese over her bagel,
and we lie together like two guitars,

a rose like a screw
in each of our mouths.
There's that liquid river of story

that sometimes sweeps us away
from all this, into the ha ha
and the tender. At night the streetlights

buzz on again with the stars,
and the horses in the field swat their tails
like we will go on forever.

*

I'm at my desk herding some lost
language and notice how quiet
she has been. Twice I call her name

and wait after my voice has lost its legs
and she does not ring back.

Dude, I'm still here, she says at last,

then the sound of her
stretching her branches, and from them
the rain falling thick through our house.

I'm racing to place pots and pans
everywhere. Bottle her in super canning jars.
For seventeen years, I've lined

the shelves of our root cellar with them.
One drop for each jar.
I'll need them for later.